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ABSTRACT

School principals must assume responsibility for initiating inservice education programs to improve reading and language arts teachers' skills and to promote quality education. Discussions provided in this paper focus on the following questions in the development of effective inservice programs: What is the nature and definition of inservice education? Who should assume responsibility for program development? When should programs begin and how long should they last? How is a sequential program planned and implemented? How are programs used to effect change? What techniques of presentation or patterns of organization exist for conducting dynamic, relevant sessions? How are educational changes, emerging as a result of inservice education, controlled administratively? An annotated bibliography provides a concise selection of professional inservice educational materials to aid program planners. (KS)

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PLANNING INSERVICE EDUCATION FOR IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING SKILLS IN READING AND RELATED LANGUAGE ARTS

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It is a common occurrence that student teachers and subsequently, first year teachers express a concern about an inadequacy in the teaching of reading. Often only one specific course is required on the undergraduate degree and tight programs prohibit taking elective, second or third courses in reading.

Many teachers attend graduate classes each semester seeking ideas (in vain sometimes) which will help solve problems encountered when teaching basic and advanced reading and language skills. Unfortunately, the graduate classroom is seldom the place for final solutions to educational problems. Theoretical models, well-intended demonstrations, professional advice and support, and procedural guidelines may be found in the graduate classes, but solutions? No!

Who, then solves educational problems in the public schools? Essentially, school principals must assume roles and responsibilities as educational leaders, agents for change and instigators of innovation. It should be their task to trigger the move for the design and implementation of inservice education. This role, to provide avenues for teachers to solve educational problems must be accomplished through INSERVICE EDUCATION, and is the crucial function of educational leadership.

When an inservice education program is intially considered, several questions immediately came to the fore. These are often the same as or very closely aligned to the following:

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1. What is the true nature and definition of inservice education?
2. Who is to assume responsibility for the leadership in developing inservice education programs?
3. When should inservice education programs begin and how long should they last?
4. How is a sequential inservice education planned and implemented?
5. How are inservice education programs used to affect change?
6. What presentational techniques or organizational patterns exist for conducting dynamic, relevant inservice sessions?
7. How are educational changes, which emerge as a result of inservice education, controlled administratively?

The purpose of this article is to answer the questions posited in clear, brief, and simple terms. Experiences and other professional sources support the following answers to the question.

QUESTION 1. What is the true nature and definition of inservice education when related to areas of reading and language arts?

Response. Inservice education should be used solely for developing the school's total faculty in becoming better prescriptive teachers who will exert (as a group, through individual efforts) direct and meaningful impact on the quality of instruction in reading and related areas of language development.

Clarification. Committee work (of any kind), curriculum planning, attending conferences or intervisitation in other classrooms does not necessarily constitute inservice education. "Only planned activities for improving the instructional capability of professional staff members," (Harris and Bessent, 1969), qualifies as inservice education.

QUESTION 2. Who is to assume responsibility for the leadership in developing inservice education programs?

Response. For far too long, the principal has given lip service to his expected role as educational leader. It is far easier to become engrossed in mundane clerical tasks, which in most instances could be adequately handled by an efficient secretary. There is a need to ask, "Have we gotten into this rut? Are we so ingrained in our patterns that we have become reluctant to delegate these mundane tasks which required so much of our time?" If this is the case the principal must now break from this style of administration for then--and only then, can he have the time to assume his role as instructional leader. With this leadership comes the responsibility for the development of inservice educational programs.

QUESTION 3. When should inservice education programs being and how long should they last?

Response. Effective inservice education is time consuming. Plans should be made for the total faculty to meet regularly at weekly or monthly sessions for new learning, reporting, summation, or evaluation. According to assigned tasks, certain inservice education programs may be ongoing for more than one year. Nevertheless, specific times, places, materials and activities must be scheduled early in the year (or the latter part of the preceding year) for the total faculty, for small groups, and for individual interaction with inservice leaders. It should be remembered that well-planned inservice education, to meet the needs of the total faculty, will not necessitate everyone doing the same thing at the same time.

Clarification: There are many deterrents to good inservice programs. Ideally as teachers learn to exhibit new behaviors in teaching, administrators

should also establish new attitudes and behaviors. Following are several options for effective scheduling plus other considerations for making inservice education more acceptable.

1. Schedule inservice workdays into the regular teaching contract so that students are released and full, uninterupted workdays are available.
2. Allow teachers released time (teacher aides, parent volunteers, or substitutes may supervise students) for major and small-group meetings.
3. Arrange college credit for the inservice work being done. Consideration should be given to paying the teachers' tuition.
4. Encourage teachers currently enrolled in college classes to gear any research or special papers to problems you are attempting to resolve.
5. Secure funding to hire teachers during the summer to work on special committee projects.
6. Contact state department officials to determine if certificate renewal credit can be awarded to teachers.

There are obvious scheduling pitfalls that reduce the effectiveness of any inservice education program. Be especially wary of late afternoon sessions coming after a full day of teaching. Sessions prior to long weekends, holidays or major community events are generally a waste of time. These, plus other variables will seriously hamper the program.

QUESTION 4. How is a sequential inservice education program planned and implemented?

Response. A problem that relates to improving the teaching and learning

of reading skills or related areas of language development may be initiated by a parent, student, teacher, administrator or a combination thereof. The first step is to identify a problem that needs to be resolved. This article presents one. "What are the steps for changing teachers' behavior in the classroom to improve the reading and related language performances of the students." The school principal must ask two questions to initiate planning:

1. Are the teachers requesting aid in learning new techniques which may be good for children?

   If the question is answered positively, then the administrator must: (a) meet with a core group or representatives responsible for initiating the request, get their views and make certain the request is not superficial, (b) survey and evaluate records of pupil progress and determine if the expressed problem is real, (c) read professional literature in the area of the request, and (d) transmit the request, with supportive evidence, to appropriate administrative levels for approval. Whether the principal needs approval from a higher authority or not, will be dictated by local policy.

2. Are the teachers requesting inservice education to increase their teaching effectiveness in an area of identified weaknesses and are they aware that their behavior must be altered before the children's behavior will change?

   This question is especially applicable to first year teachers or experienced teachers confronted with implementing new materials or techniques without sufficient training. If the second question (2)

is answered affirmatively, the principal must evaluate the problem, following the general guidelines expressed in question one.

Once a specific felt need or problem is determined the principal would be well advised to consider the establishment of a faculty inservice council. From these faculty should emerge a general staff leader who would assume primary responsibility for the group. With the staff leader and the council, the principal should make available to the group and/or seek from them, the names of university or state department consultants with expertise in the general area of concern. Once this is accomplished, the group leader should then take charge of the committee. This does not preclude the principal from maintaining the role of instructional leader--for once a basic organization has been established the principal can revert to a general staff leader, probing for other areas of concern that need faculty attention.

The general staff leader must be knowledgable, competent, energetic, and dynamic. (Space requirements do not allow for staff qualifications and responsibilities in this presentation, but the bibliography has excellent sources for the readers' consideration.) Organizing and planning for in-service education cooperatively with the faculty and consultant, to improve reading and related language arts areas and reporting to the principal is the task of the general staff leader. The council will continue to develop the plan and share individually in implementing it. Although this presentation identifies a problem or need, the total step in planning the program include:

Step 1. Identify the total faculty's NEEDS in improving their teaching of, or relationship to, children's reading and related language arts performance.

Step 2. Determine sets of measurable OBJECTIVES, based on broad general goals. These sets (or groups) of objectives should be geared to satisfying the established individual goals of the school. Both the goals and objectives should exhibit a scope and sequence that shows concern for both overall school philosophy and the immediate needs of students.

Step 3. Determine ACTIVITIES which will satisfy criteria stated in the objectives and then plan for and schedule the activities. This step supports the earlier statement that any lecture, committee assignment, college course and/or conference cannot necessarily be considered inservice. Once the objectives have been established, the appropriate activities must be determined. The lecture method may be appropriate or an educational conference may have sessions that teachers could extract worthwhile techniques to take home and teach to others. A college class may also aid in achieving objectives or there may be local experts among the faculty and the community who could help achieve the established goals. One teacher may be especially skillful in language experience techniques, the librarian in textbook evaluation, or the principal in psychological testing. However, it is dangerous to develop your own inservice without outside consultative help. Reputable outside consultants can furnish the objectivity needed in developing in-service education.

Step 4. Once goals, objectives and activities have been established, methods of MEASUREMENT must be determined. Two questions must be asked: (a) To what degree can and must teachers meet the criteria established for objectives and (b) What will constitute the levels students can and must perform to be judged proficient? Inservice education may change teachers' behavior but some teachers with newly learned techniques, may be unable to affect the behavior of their students. For this reason, criteria must be established to evaluate to groups (as individuals): (1) the teachers and (2) the students. As teachers learn new teaching techniques they must be aware that their roles are not only that of scientific designers of learning situations, but as artistic, creative, compassionate human beings dealing with children.

Step 5. When it has been established that the program is flexibly finalized, initiate a time SCHEDULE to accomplish these tasks. Previous comments on this topic were mentioned in question 2 and do not warrant repeating. Those previously stated alternatives for scheduling, however, should serve as a guide in the development of a time line for all involved parties.

QUESTION 5. How are inservice education programs used to affect change?

Response. Tomorrow, a principal walking into any teacher's room would find problems. How many students exhibit reading, writing, speaking and listening difficulties? Sitting with a few students and listening to them read will support this. Do they stumble over words, miss one out of twenty running words, and have difficulty explaining what they have read? Their syntactical patterns, subject-verb agreements and independent spelling

abilities may be remarkably weak in written compositions. Those problems alone, should be reasons enough to develop inservice programs. The "how?" must come from the instructional leader of the school. The principal must act as a facilitator in helping teachers identify problems and needs. Once this is done, the teachers should be allowed to pursue solutions. The principal, however, to support these changes must be in agreement with them. When the results of inservice education make learning easier for students and teaching easier for teachers, the successful changes in behavior have been realized.

QUESTION 6. What presentational techniques or organizational patterns can be used to develop dynamic, relevant inservice sessions?

Response. Several techniques or formats exist for inservice training. Essentially the format or techniques (organizational patterns) used should be pragmatically matched to the stated objectives. Short lectures to the total faculty may establish backgrounds and prescribe procedures for teaching written composition skills. Demonstration teaching by a faculty member with peer observation and evaluation may be effective as may small group sessions arranged by grade levels. The latter may enable teachers to develop topics and procedures unique to and appropriate for their specific teaching assignment. Proper involvement of the faculty in appropriate activities is the key to a successful inservice education program. An unimaginative inservice program is doomed to failure but those who use a variety of techniques, will develop a staff to the fullest capacity.

A list of techniques includes:

1. Lectures

2. Illustrated lecutres
3. Demonstrations
4. Observations
5. Interviewing
6. Brainstorming
7. Group discussions
8. Buzz sessions
9. Role-playing
10. Guided practice (Harris and Bessent, 1969).

QUESTION 7. How are educational changes, which emerge as a result of inservice education, controlled administratively.

Response. Administrative control is first of all realized through the "planned change" aspects of inservice education programs. Some control must be exerted, however, and procedures which are contrary to existing school policy are not allowed until those policies are changed. (Harris and Bessent, 1969). The principal should first employ competent teachers. If teachers desiring change can identify problems and needs, and support the reasons for the changes with professional expertise, why should they not be encouraged? Overzealous teachers who attempt to move too quickly, however, may in fact reverse the direction of the intended gains. In reality, too much change, too fast, may be disastrous and caution should be exercised.

Finally, Harris and Bessent (1969) list three areas which have precipitated failure in some inservice education attempts.

1. "Failure to relate genuine inservice educational program plans to genuine needs of staff participants."

2. "Failure to select appropriate activities for implementing program plans."

3. "Failure to implement inservice activities with sufficient staff and other resources to assure effectiveness."

These pitfalls should be kept paramount in the minds of all participants. The instructional leader must guard against inservice meetings called on short notice or the arrival of a consultant whose purpose is unknown to the staff. Likewise, the teacher must constantly bring the stated objectives of the program to the fore, avoiding a deviation which ultimately would lead to failure.

Obviously topics and needs, as they relate to the improvement of learning skills in reading and related language arts are varied and must be internally determined within the school. The material contained in the annotated bibliography may lead to school faculties being able to identify problems and needs, state objectives and goals, develop evaluative devises, and schedule learning activities using a variety of techniques to change their own behavior in the classroom and affect the skills of children in reading and related language areas in a vertical direction.

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